(d) With a view to reduce delays in collection of outstation cheques, Reserve Bank of India have advised all public sector banks to use inter-city computerised clearing and courier services for speedy transmission of cheques. Besides, banks have been directed to offer immediate credit for outstation cheques upto Rs. 5,000/- to individual account holders and to pay interest @2 per cent p.a. over the savings bank interest rate for delayed collection of cheques beyond 10/14 days.

Hike in Prices of Consumer Goods

*337. SHRI SURESH PACHOURI: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it has been reported in the press that the consumers will have to pay 20 per cent more on consumer items;

(b) if so, whether Government have examined these press reports;

(c) whether these prices have increased due to the levy of excise duty on a number of consumer goods manufactured by Small Scale Sector;

(d) if so, to what extent the price-rise has been noticed during March-April so far; and

(e) what steps are being taken by Government to check the hike in prices?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI M. V. CHANDRASHEKHAR MURTHY) : (a) and (b) In the absence of any specific details, it is difficult to confirm or examine such reports.

(c) to (e) Prices of any commodity are governed by market forces and excise duty is only one of the factors. Moreover, small scale units with a turnover upto Rs. 2 crores have generally not been affected by the Budget proposals as they will not be required to pay duty on clearances upto Rs. 30 lakhs. For further clearances upto an aggregate value of Rs. 75 lakhs, the SSI units are required to pay duty at concessional rates. It is only when clearances exceed Rs. 75 lakhs that they are required to pay normal duty. Thus the exemptions withdrawn in the budget will not affect tiny and genuinely small scale units.

Loss of Foreign Exchange through Foreign Airlines

*338. SHRI MOHAMMED AFZAL alias MEEM AFZAL: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) how much foreign exchange went out of the country through the foreign airlines during the period 1993-94 airline-wise; and

(b) how much foreign exchange was earned by Air India and Indian Airlines during the said period?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI M. V. CHANDRASHEKHAR MURTHY) : (a) and (b) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Powerloom Units in the Country

*339. SHRI PRAGADA KOTAIAH : Will the Minister of TEXTILES be pleased to state:

(a) the number of powerloom units in the country and the number of workers working therein, both in weaving and preparatory process;

(b) the number of powerlooms units with more than 10 powerlooms under one roof, employing more than 10 workers both in weaving and preparatory process of winding, warping, pirning etc.;

(c) whether powerloom units with more han 10 looms under one roof are governd by factory and labour laws;

(d) whether facilities like hygenic conditions, job security, standard wages, PF and gratuity, Medical care under ESI are provided to the workers in the powerloom units with more than 10 looms;

(e) whether the workers on powerlooms in units with more than 10 looms are treated at par with workers in powerlooms in textile mills relating to facilities and concessions; and

(f) if not, the reasons therefor?